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ABSTRACT

Efforts to improve educational quality are hampered by shortages of qualified teachers. These shortages are related to several factors, including misassignment of teachers, inadequate teacher education, lack of clarity about educational priorities, insufficient rewards, and low levels of collegial support aimed at improving practice. Educational quality is also held down by misdirected administrative priorities and poor systems for curriculum development. Steps to encourage the professionalization of teaching will enhance educational quality if these steps involve granting teachers greater responsibility for their profession. Measures to increase teacher professionalism include reducing the number of education courses education majors are required to take and increasing the number of courses required in subject areas to be taught; increasing inservice pedagogical training; assigning master teachers to plan and conduct staff development; revising teacher pay scales to reward professional development; reducing the principal's managerial role and increasing the instructional leadership role; and placing curriculum development in the hands of skilled teachers. State agencies must be involved in developing comprehensive programs to improve quality, but local efforts can encourage the process. (PGD)

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Volume 17/Number 6/June 1986

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The education reform movement is recognizing none to soon that the greatest obstacle to school improvement is the growing shortage of qualified teachers in our classrooms. Requiring students to study more math, science, and foreign language will have nebulous results unless there are sufficient teachers who are appropriately prepared to teach these and other desirable subjects.

Teachers are leaving the profession for a variety of reasons, including opportunities for more money and improved working conditions elsewhere; fewer are entering it. Teaching rarely is the career of choice for our best students.

Short on quality

Those who remain in the classrooms range from the highly skilled to the incompetent. But they may lack even more than the talent and skills to teach. Teacher misassignment—placing "out-of-field" teachers in assignments for which they are not prepared—is a greater problem than school leaders may want to acknowledge.

According to a recent report ("Making Do in the Classroom: A Report on the Misassignment of Teachers") by the Council for Basic Education and the American Federation of Teachers, schools can waive credentials requirements too easily; in six states, for instance, there are *no* restrictions against out-of-field placements.

Robert R. Spillane is superintendent of Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools. This article is based in part on the paper he presented before the National Governor's Association Task Force on Teaching in December 1985.

As an administrator, I often have been frustrated when trying to recruit and retain good teachers and, even more so, when trying to train and motivate mediocre teachers. My frustration has been borne not of disappointment with particular people, but of dissatisfaction with a system of preparation, certification, supervision, inservice training, and compensation that fails to produce highly qualified teachers who can provide the best instruction possible for our students. The problems are inherent in the system, and measures to alleviate them must, therefore, be comprehensive; they must address all aspects of teaching.

The term that I and others use to describe this comprehensive series of changes is "professionalization." What it means is making teachers responsible to each other and to the highest standards of the teaching profession for the quality of their teaching.

Under current conditions, elementary and secondary-school teaching cannot be considered a profession for several reasons.

Flawed certification standards

By law, public school teachers must be trained in a school or department of education to be certified to teach. This policy assumes that education has a "knowledge base," independent of the subject matter to be taught, that must be acquired from professors of education.

With almost 30 years of experience and a Ph.D. in education, I am not at all convinced that a foundation of esoteric knowledge exists for pedagogy as it does, for instance, for law and medicine. In fact, if the average education school entrants were not less academically able than entrants into other colleges and departments—which, unfortunately, they are—they probably would have less tolerance for education courses that often are stultifying and do little to prepare students for teaching. Worst of all, these meager required education courses reduce the time available for acquiring a substantive general education and concentrating on subject matter that will be taught.

School mission unclear

The confused priorities of teacher preparation reflect an important underlying problem with education today: confusion about the school's mission. Schools today are asked to meet practically every individual and social need, and, too often, teachers do not clearly understand their mission. Is it "social adjustment" or academic learning? Arthur Bestor, in his 1955 book *The Restoration of Learning*, describes my view of the school's mission:

> *An indispensible function of education, at every level, is to provide sound training in the fundamental ways of thinking represented by history, science, mathematics, literature, language, art, and the other disciplines evolved in the course of mankind's long quest for usable knowledge, cultural understanding, and intellectual power. To advance moral conduct, responsible citizenship, and social adjustment is, of course, a vital function of education. But, like the other agencies which contribute to these ends, the school must work within the context provided by its own characteristic activity. In other words, the particular contribution which the*

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school can make is determined by, and related to, the primary fact that it is an agency of intellectual training.

Teachers must understand and value this fundamental mission of their profession. Greater respect for learning cannot be conveyed to students unless it first is possessed by teachers.

Inadequate rewards

Teachers are not adequately rewarded for their work—either monetarily or otherwise. "Otherwise" includes their status in the community, and the encouragement they receive to broaden their knowledge and experience in their academic fields.

Neither the monetary nor the "other" rewards adequately encourage teachers to do professional work beyond that required of every teacher. Adjunct responsibilities, such as lunch duty, chaperoning dances, checking bathrooms, or even coaching sports, may be rewarding for many reasons, but they are not "professional."

Inadequate assistance

While prospective teachers are inadequately prepared to deal with the actual situations they encounter in their first public school teaching assignments, the resources that could prepare them for these assignments—the experienced teachers already in the schools—are not motivated by school sytems to provide this training. Despite all the research to support the effectiveness of peer coaching and mentor teachers, time and money go to the university schools and departments of education rather than to experienced teachers who really could help.

Instruction not priority

The way schools are organized does not encourage administrators to make the quality of instruction their first priority. One of the less-cited sections of *A Nation at Risk* calls for leadership, as distinct from management, by educational adminstrators. This means instructional leadership.

I am hardly the first to point out that the term "principal" derives from "principal teacher." But principals too seldom consider improvement of instruction their highest priority. The message should be: "However important the report, the response to the letter, or the facilities modification, the effectiveness of the instructional program comes first. Your relationship with teachers and your understanding and coordination of the instructional program must be your highest priority because it is your state's, your school board's, your superintendent's, and—most important—your students' highest priority."

Invalid curriculum process

The curriculum in our schools frequently is inadequate—either intellectually because it is trivial or confused, or pedagogically because it is unusable by real teachers in real classrooms. This problem results from the so-called "curriculum development process" that includes statewide and systemwide textbook selections and curriculum decisions that often place the satisfaction of all constituencies above the intellectual integrity and vision which a curriculum needs if it is to cohere, command respect, and provide needed flexibility.

My model of a curriculum developer is a person rigorously educated in the discipline for which the curriculum is being developed (academic disciplines such as mathematics, English, and history, rather than educationist "disciplines" such as "curriculum and instruction"). Such a person is able to break down this discipline into its fundamental elements and reassemble them in ways that are both intellectually honest and accessible to students of various abilities at various grade levels.

Few and far between as such people may be, they do exist. The problem is finding and nurturing them so that teachers have the best curriculum direction and the best instructional materials possible.

Proposals

Over the past five years, one or another guru or committee has suggested measures to alleviate one or another of these problems. Merit pay, career ladders, educational specialty boards, national teacher testing, educational voucher systems, and increases in beginning teachers' salaries are among the suggestions heard recently.

Any or all of these could be a part of the "professionalization" of teaching, but none of them will result in a comprehensive reform of the profession unless teachers become actively involved in the changes. To give teachers more responsibility for their profession, I propose several measures, all of which assume a differentiated reward system.

- Lower the number of education courses required for certification and, concomitantly, raise the number of required courses in the academic disciplines. The required course in "education" should be limited to one or two full-year courses that should be planned carefully and taught to prepare prospective teachers for internships. Well-educated people who have not taken such courses should be permitted to meet education course requirements through such alternative means as an examination and/or paid internship.
- Provide additional pedagogical training in the public schools where recognized master teachers and administrators would "show the ropes" to the teachers who have been broadly educated in their undergraduate years. These mentors would be selected carefully and paid for their mentorship.
- Create special categories of "master teachers" to plan and conduct staff development activities, act as mentors for beginning teachers, develop curriculum, and advise principals and other administrators on instructional matters. Give them extra pay for performing these special assignments, as well as professional responsibilities and recognition commensurate

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with their outstanding abilities. Selection of master teachers would have to be in the hands of the profession—the teachers who set and maintain standards for their profession, including the intellectual standards of instruction in each academic discipline.

- Revise teacher pay scales to tie increments to professionally relevant criteria such as coursework in pertinent academic disciplines, completion of inservice courses that focus on implementing specific curricula or improving classroom instructional skills, and evaluation of professional growth by master teachers and principal-teachers.

- Redefine the role of the principal—the person in charge of the individual school—away from the "management model" and toward the "principal-teacher" model. While the principal-teacher would continue to be responsible to the superintendent for all aspects of school operation, supervising and improving the quality of instruction would be the principal's highest priority. Relationships between principals and teachers would be more collegial and mutually supportive because they would be depending upon one another's expertise to achieve a common goal. The principal's credibility as an evaluator would be enhanced, thereby addressing a fundamental flaw in career ladder and merit pay plans whose success or failure depends ultimately on teacher confidence in the evaluation system.

- Place curriculum development and inservice training in the hands of skilled teachers, typically master teachers with advanced degrees in their subject areas with teaching experience at the appropriate grade levels. Such people would be responsible for curriculum development at both the state and local levels, and for training teachers to implement the curricula they develop. They would have a collegial working relationship with college professors in their disciplines, and those professors, in turn, would help with curriculum development. This type of curriculum development should eventually drive textbook development and selection, rather than the other way around as is common today.

- Use master teachers with special expertise in dealing with particular problems to advise administrators and policy-making bodies on those areas. Solving the problem of educating inner-city adolescents, for example, requires applying the advice of those teachers who are dealing with it successfully.

These suggestions are not discrete from one another; they are held together by the overall plan to professionalize teaching. This means, for example, that education course requirements should not be reduced without developing mentored internships; that mentors should not be selected without developing a master-teacher program; that master teachers should not be selected without establishing an independent selection mechanism that has integrity and credibility; that principals' priorities should not be changed without providing them with the background they will need for their new role; that salary increments should not be changed unless adequate mechanisms for evaluating the new criteria are in place.

Local applications

Obviously, this comprehensive agenda cannot be accomplished overnight or, perhaps, even in five years. Much of this agenda depends on the vision and cooperation of state education, legislative, and higher education leaders. But it is necessary for local education leaders—school board members, educators, and citizens—to encourage those in powerful places to give this agenda a high priority.

Demonstrating local initiative to address existing problems often is the best way to get the attention of those with the power to make comprehensive changes. The first step is to assess local conditions. For example, find out if your school system is:

- experiencing a teacher shortage (in quantity and/or quality);
- hiring teachers who studied "education" more than the subject matter they are teaching;
- losing teachers to alternative careers;
- assigning teachers inappropriately;
- granting tenure too easily;
- assisting beginning teachers adequately;
- using principals as managers rather than as instructional leaders;
- paying teachers according to criteria unrelated to their professional growth.

Then, determine how your community can address any problems revealed.

A local process

In Fairfax County, Va., I have named a Blue Ribbon Commission to address many of these concerns. The commission is composed of county residents with expertise and high interest in education (among them three former school board members, the state PTA president, the presidents of the local teacher organization and state university, and business and industry leaders). It is charged to define the issues involved in attracting, training, and holding the best candidates to the profession of teaching.

Specifically, the commission is to:

- Identify the weaknesses in the current system of teacher compensation;
- Define appropriate changes in the compensation structure to include examining the issue of merit pay;
- Suggest methods of differentiating staffing to include examining such concepts as master teachers and career ladders;
- Suggest methods for building respect for teaching and teachers;
- Recommend a process for licensing teachers;
- Define the essentials in professional development.

We are hopeful that the results of the commission's efforts will guide us in addressing our local concerns. But we also hope that the commission's recommendations will extend beyond Fairfax County's borders to send a clear and unequivocal message to state and national leaders that the professionalization of teaching is an agenda that must be addressed—now.

The payoffs will be substantial: talented teachers with high aspirations for themselves and their students; teachers satisfied with their work and their profession; students learning from committed and well-prepared teachers; vastly increased status for education as a profession; and a national commitment to excellent schools.

We cannot ignore these important goals. ■